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ABSTRACT

Interim Report 2 of the Task Force on Responsible Decisions about Alcohol focuses on the issue of responsible decisions in regard to alcohol abuse. In this report, the task force defines responsible decisions as those in which respect for oneself and others are considered, and discusses situational, health, and safety responsibilities. Some situational responsibilities included are (a) providing other social activities as a primary focus when beverage alcohol is served, (b) respecting an individual's decision about alcohol, (c) assuming responsibility for the health and safety of guests, and (d) recognizing that drunkenness is not safe. A few of the health responsibilities outlined include (a) abstaining from use of alcohol for reasons of health, (b) setting a limit on consumption, and (c) recognizing that alcohol is a drug and understanding its effects. Safety responsibilities listed include (a) avoiding the performance of complex tasks while under the influence of alcohol, (b) avoiding riding with a driver under the influence of alcohol, (c) drinking only in relaxed and responsible situations, and (d) drinking in moderation. This report also lists skills for responsible decision-making, and discusses efforts of the task force to help establish social policy that will minimize alcohol abuse and alcoholism. (MK)

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INTRODUCTION

In 1973, the Education Commission of the States (ECS) Task Force on Responsible Decisions about Alcohol undertook a study to determine how the nation's total education system might help reduce one of our biggest health and social problems—alcohol abuse and alcoholism.

This is a summary of the second interim report of that task force. It examines what constitutes "responsible decisions" in terms of human behavior and conduct.

Two Responsible Decisions about Alcohol

Although there are no simple solutions to problems as complex as alcohol abuse and alcoholism, perhaps the one holding the most promise is the concept of responsible decision making. Responsible decisions result in behavior that demonstrates respect and concern for oneself and others. Thus, responsible decisions enhance individual development and promote healthy human interaction. They should not be arrived at without careful thought because an arbitrary decision is susceptible to arbitrary change.

The task force has concluded that two reasonable decisions can be made regarding the use of beverage alcohol: not to use it, or to use it responsibly. There are good reasons for choosing either alternative. For example, many people choose not to drink because of personal health concerns. Others do not drink because of religious beliefs, moral considerations or values. Others make the decision not to drink, or not

to drink in certain situations, because many activities, such as maintaining a home, driving a car or resolving family problems may become hazardous or impossible if alcohol is involved.

Similarly, the decision to drink responsibly may be based on the social benefits many attribute to the responsible use of alcohol. These include relaxation, relief of tensions, taste appeal to some and limited health benefits for others.

In order to understand and clarify what constitutes acceptable and reasonable use, the task force is attempting to identify responsible behavior and create an awareness of individual and community responsibility regarding alcohol.

The New Optimism

There is reason for considerable optimism about the problems of alcohol abuse and alcoholism. First, many Americans do not use alcohol; second, most of those who do usually use it responsibly. However, many people still abuse alcohol on various occasions, and as many as 10 million people suffer from alcohol abuse and alcoholism.

We believe the skills and attitudes necessary to make responsible decisions can be identified and learned. That belief is the basis for our optimism.

The Challenge

Millions of Americans have made decisions not to use alcohol or to use it responsibly, but society as a whole has failed to develop clear and consistent guidelines about responsible use. Such guidelines could help people make decisions about alcohol that would enhance rather than detract from their

lives – in short, how to drink responsibly if one chooses to drink. If actual and potential alcohol misuse is to be decreased, millions of Americans need to know what is expected of them. They need to know how their behaviors must change to become "responsible." Young people especially must know what outcomes result from their choices. Rather than trying to define the amount of alcohol one may safely consume, we need to develop specific definitions of behaviors and attitudes about alcohol. The task force accepts this challenge and agrees on a number of desired behaviors and attitudes, which can be grouped as situational, health and safety responsibilities. The following listing is representative, rather than all inclusive.

a. **Situational Responsibility**

The social situation can either help or hinder responsible decisions about alcohol. Responsible serving of alcohol can make responsible decisions easier. The task force has identified situational behaviors that will promote responsible decision making and recommends the following guidelines:

- Providing other social activities as a primary focus when beverage alcohol is served.
- Respecting an individual's decision about alcohol, if that decision is either to abstain or to drink responsibly.
- Recognizing the decision not to drink and the respect it warrants by providing equally attractive and accessible non-alcoholic drinks when alcohol is served.
- Recognizing that drunkenness is neither healthy nor safe. One should

not excuse otherwise unacceptable behavior either for that individual or for others solely because of "too much to drink."

- Providing food when alcohol is served.
- Serving drinks that are diluted and not urging that glasses be constantly full.
- Keeping the cocktail hour before dinner to a reasonable time and consumption limit.
- Recognizing a responsibility for the health, safety and pleasure of both the drinker and the non-drinker by avoiding intoxication and helping others to do the same.
- Making contingency plans for intoxication, if it occurs in spite of efforts to prevent it, by assuming responsibility for the health and safety of guests – transportation home, overnight accommodations, etc.
- Drinking in the company of others.
- Serving or using alcohol only in environments conducive to pleasant and relaxing behavior.
- Understanding one's own rationale for making a decision about alcohol.

b. **Health Responsibilities**

Responsible decision making requires that the individual understand the implications alcohol has for personal health. To enhance personal health, the task force suggests the following guidelines:

- Choosing to abstain from the use of alcohol for reasons of health or physical fitness.
- Setting a limit on the consumption of alcohol that is well within individual limits, which vary from time to time for every individual.
- Being particularly cautious about us-

ing alcohol when other drugs are used.

- Recognizing that alcohol is a drug and understanding its effects.
- Heeding the advice of a physician either to avoid the use of alcohol or to use it as prescribed for specific health reasons.
- Choosing to avoid the frequent use of alcohol for purposes of coping with problems.
- Recognizing that social acceptability does not require drinking.
- Drinking slowly, rather than hurriedly; avoiding the gulping of a straight drink.

c. **Safety Responsibilities**

Traditional warnings regarding the safety of alcohol must be considered in responsible decision making. The safe and judicious use of beverage alcohol affects the individual and other members of society as well. The task force suggests the following guidelines:

- Choosing to avoid performing complex tasks, such as operating machinery, driving a car or engaging in other physical activities with inherent safety hazards, while under the influence of alcohol.
- Avoiding riding with a driver who is under the influence of alcohol, and discouraging him or her from driving.
- Recognizing that one's behavior and attitudes affect and will influence others, especially children.
- Drinking only in relaxed and responsible social situations.
- Drinking in moderation, even though one thinks one's alcohol tolerance is high.

Knowledge and Skills

Any responsible decision is based in part on understanding the changing demands and pressures of society. The task force agrees that relevant new knowledge and the development of specific skills can help individuals deal with these demands and pressures. In order to make responsible decisions, one is dependent on this continuing education process and upon the norms established to control alcohol beverage distribution. To increase the opportunities for making responsible decisions, the following skills are required:

- Decision-making skills.
- Communication skills.
- Inter- and intra-personal skills.
- Values clarification skills.
- Leisure activity skills.
- Coping skills.

Our society must also develop the services and a system for delivering those services that will give people the information and support they need to develop and maintain these skills.

Toward a Responsible Public Policy

The major goal of the Task Force on Responsible Decisions about Alcohol is to help establish social policy that will minimize alcohol abuse and alcoholism.

The first interim report (January 1975) summarized task force conclusions that there should be a new emphasis on the prevention of alcohol problems. This second report presents further task force conclusions, provides examples of responsible decisions people should make regarding alcohol and sets forth guidelines for situations in which alcohol is served and used, as well as health

and safety considerations.

Members of the task force agree that, at the present time, not enough is known about how these conclusions and guidelines can be applied to establish responsible public policy on alcohol use. Nor is it clear how information and services can be developed and delivered to a mass society that needs to alter many basic practices regarding beverage alcohol.

The task force is considering two approaches. The first is technically described as "norms," which comprise the rules, regulations and attitudes that determine behavior. For example, formal norms might be laws, regulations or policies from an official source such as government, a church or a company. Informal norms might include social pressures and customs.

A second approach worthy of consideration is education through information, skill development and attitude change. The task force is now investigating these and other methods that can be used to help develop responsible decisions about alcohol and that may help change attitudes or develop acceptable norms regarding alcohol.

We hope a combination of (1) the norms of society and (2) education and skill development of people can be utilized to clarify public policy regarding alcohol. With the definition and development of such policy and with influential social groups and organizations providing support and assistance in implementation, it should be easier for people to make responsible decisions about their lives. A reduction in

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the incidence of alcohol abuse and alcoholism should result.

The First Step toward a New Public Policy

A number of key issues will need to be carefully evaluated as the task force tries to develop a clearly delineated and more responsible public policy toward alcohol. The task force has determined that the following issues relating to norms should be studied:

- Age limit.
- Permits to drink.
- Local option.
- State-run stores.
- Dram shop laws (liability of licensee for damage caused by consumers of alcohol beverages).
- Hours of sale.
- License limitations.
- Taxation and price.
- Food sale with alcohol.
- Breathalyzer tests in public places.
- Ingredients and warning labels.
- Relationship of alcohol beverage control laws to prevention.
- Uniform prevention laws and a model control and prevention act.

The task force further recommends consideration of the following issues dealing with both norms and education:

- Serving alcohol beverages on college campuses.
- Preventive health services.
- Teaching children responsible decision-making skills regarding alcohol.
- Social support for both abstaining and responsible drinking.
- Media advertising responsibilities.
- The atmosphere and environment

of drinking establishments.

- The roles and responsibilities of related professions and disciplines regarding alcohol.
- The responsibility of business and industry to the quality of life of their personnel.
- Administrative responsibilities of government officials and state, federal and local agencies for prevention services.

Public Policy Statements

Public policy regarding decisions about alcohol must be initiated in both the public and private sectors. It must then be endorsed by a vast array of state, local and national representation, including the family and community, business and industry, religious organizations and educational and political leadership. As a first step, the task force has developed a series of action plans to be considered by those who influence public policy development. These plans strongly recommend the adoption of approaches to alcohol that emphasize responsible decision making, including accompanying acceptable behaviors. We firmly believe that the dissemination and implementation of these action plans can improve the quality of life of our nation's citizens. That is our goal. We are committed to its attainment. A variety of sample public policy statements follows.

The following sample policy statements are intended to assist governors, legislators, state agency heads, community leaders and representatives of the alcohol beverage industry in creating greater awareness of responsible behaviors about alcohol. We urge immediate action through adoption of these policy statements.

MEMORANDUM

TO:

FROM: The Office of (the Governor/Agency Head)
State of

RE: Policy Statement on Responsible Decisions about Alcohol

In view of the overwhelming evidence relating to the increasingly serious problems of alcohol abuse and alcoholism, all state-sponsored functions that include the serving of alcohol will adhere to and promote the following guidelines regarding alcohol.

When alcohol is served:

- The serving of alcohol will be a secondary focus at these functions.
- Food will be served with alcohol.
- Drinks will be of diluted strength, and hosts or sponsors will not urge that glasses be constantly full.
- Equally attractive and accessible non-alcoholic drinks will be provided.
- The cocktail hour before dinner will be kept to a reasonable time and consumption limit.
- The host or sponsor of the function should assume responsibility for thoughtful consideration of guests' health, safety and pleasure by avoiding intoxication and helping others to do the same.
- It should be recognized that drunkenness is neither healthy nor safe. One should not excuse otherwise unacceptable behavior either for that individual or for others solely because of "too much to drink."
- Alcohol will be served or used only in environments conducive to pleasant and relaxing behavior.

There are two responsible decisions about alcohol: (1) not to serve or use it, or (2) to serve or use it as outlined above.

Signed

Date

JOINT RESOLUTION

Offered

Expressing the sense of the General Assembly regarding responsible decisions about alcohol.

WHEREAS, The problems of alcohol abuse and alcoholism are taking a devastating toll in economic loss and human misery in the communities of our state and nation; and

WHEREAS, There is overwhelming evidence to support the premise that treatment of these problems, while still absolutely necessary, is not sufficient to the purpose of long-range reduction or solution to the problems; and

WHEREAS, There needs to be developed a public policy that makes prevention a priority issue in order to diminish the problems of alcohol abuse and alcoholism; and

WHEREAS, Prevention education will require the efforts of many influential elements in our society, including the school, family, church, business, industry and labor, so as to develop comprehensive systems for delivering prevention services in a more integrated and cooperative fashion; and

WHEREAS, The seriousness of the problems of alcohol abuse and alcoholism is recognized and the need for the development of public policy that supports specific responsible decision-making practices about alcohol is an urgent priority; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the general assembly of the state of urges all citizens and organizations to become familiar with issues relating to the exercise of individual responsibility about alcohol; and furthermore, if one drinks, to review personal drinking practices and attitudes for the purpose of maintaining or developing practices likely to be most effective in protecting one's health, happiness and well being, as well as that of others; therefore, be it further

RESOLVED, That the general assembly of the state of does not wish to interfere with lawful, private decisions about alcohol; however, to assist the citizens of our state in examining issues and personal practices, the following guidelines are provided for consideration:

Situational Responsibilities

- Respecting an individual's decision about alcohol, if that decision is either to abstain or to drink responsibly.
- Recognizing the decision not to drink and the respect that it warrants by providing equally attractive and accessible non-alcoholic drinks when alcohol is served.
- Recognizing a responsibility for the health, safety and pleasure of both the drinker and the non-drinker by avoiding intoxication and helping others to do the same.
- Providing other social activities as a primary focus when beverage alcohol is served.
- Providing food when alcohol is served.
- Serving drinks that are diluted and not urging that glasses be constantly full.
- Keeping the cocktail hour before dinner to a reasonable time and consumption limit.
- Recognizing that drunkenness is neither healthy nor safe. One should not excuse otherwise unacceptable behavior either for that individual or for others solely because of "too much to drink."
- Making contingency plans for intoxication, if it occurs in spite of efforts to prevent it, by assuming responsibility for the health and safety of guests – transportation home, overnight accommodations, etc.

Safety Responsibilities

- Choosing to avoid performing complex tasks, such as operating machinery, driving a car or engaging in other physical activities with inherent safety hazards, while under the influence of alcohol.
- Choosing to avoid riding with a driver who is under the influence of alcohol, and discouraging him or her from driving.
- Recognizing that one's behavior and attitudes affect and will influence others, especially children.
- Drinking only in relaxed and responsible social situations.
- Drinking in moderation, even though one thinks one's alcohol tolerance is high.

Health Responsibilities

- Choosing to abstain from the use of alcohol for reasons of health or physical fitness.
- Setting a limit on the consumption of alcohol that is well within individual limits, which vary from time to time for every individual.
- Being particularly cautious about using alcohol when other drugs are used.
- Recognizing that alcohol is a drug and understanding its effects.
- Heeding the advice of a physician either to avoid the use of alcohol or to use it as prescribed for specific health reasons.
- Recognizing that the frequent use of alcohol to cope with problems is high-risk behavior.
- Watching for dramatic changes in personality or mood while drinking since these can be an early sign of a problem that needs attention.
- Recognizing that social acceptability does not require drinking.
- Drinking slowly, rather than hurriedly, avoiding the gulping of a straight drink.

MEMORANDUM

TO:

FROM:

RE: Policy Statement on Responsible Decisions about Alcohol: An Action Plan for Volunteer and Professional Organizations

In view of the overwhelming evidence that points to the devastating cost of alcohol abuse and alcoholism to our society, both in terms of economic loss and human misery, and in response to the increasing need to mobilize our nation's resources toward the prevention of these problems, this organization will promote and support the following guidelines and policies regarding responsible decisions about alcohol among the members of this organization as well as in the communities we serve:

- An individual's decision not to use alcohol or to use it responsibly should be respected.
- One should choose to avoid performing complex tasks, such as operating machinery, driving a car or engaging in other physical activities with inherent safety hazards, while under the influence of alcohol.
- It should be recognized that drunkenness is neither healthy nor safe. One should not excuse otherwise unacceptable behavior either for that individual or for others solely because of "too much to drink."
- Individuals should set a personal limit on the consumption of alcohol that is well within their own limits, which vary from time to time for every individual.
- Other social activities should be provided as a primary focus when alcohol is served.
- Food should be provided when alcohol is served.
- When alcohol is served, equally attractive and accessible non-alcoholic drinks should be provided.
- Individuals should recognize a responsibility for the health, safety and pleasure of both the drinker and the non-drinker by avoiding intoxication and helping others to do the same.
- The cocktail hour before meals should be kept to a reasonable time and consumption limit.
- Alcohol should be served and used only in environments conducive to relaxed and responsible behavior.

In order to demonstrate our commitment to the concept of prevention and responsible decisions about alcohol, we will lead or cooperate with efforts to:

- Provide for the members of our organization – as well as for the families of the communities we serve – accurate, clear and consistent information regarding responsible decisions about alcohol and the concept of prevention.
- Mobilize community resources for the purpose of facilitating attitudes and behaviors leading to responsible decisions about alcohol.
- Seek promising methods and techniques of prevention education and promote their implementation.
- Develop a constituency that will help frame public policy regarding the community's responsibility for the prevention of alcohol abuse and alcoholism in the context of people's daily living experiences.
- Bring this statement to the attention of the general public.

Signed

Date

MEMORANDUM

TO:

FROM: The Alcohol Beverage Industry

RE: Policy Statement on Responsible Decisions about Alcohol

In order to serve the communities where our products are sold and used, and for the purpose of preventing the irresponsible use of these products, the alcohol beverage industry, by its own initiative, will make available to the consumer, upon purchase of our products, information specifying what constitutes the responsible use of these products. This will be accomplished by providing an accompanying booklet that will describe and promote responsible practices relating to:

Situational responsibilities such as:

- Respecting an individual's decision about alcohol, especially the decision not to drink, and recognizing that decision and the respect that it warrants by providing equally attractive and accessible non-alcoholic drinks when alcohol is served.
- The serving of food with beverage alcohol.
- Providing other social activities as a primary focus when beverage alcohol is served.
- Serving drinks of reasonable strength.
- Keeping the cocktail hour before dinner to a reasonable time and consumption limit.
- Recognizing a responsibility for the health, safety and pleasure of both the drinker and the non-drinker by avoiding intoxication and helping others to do the same.
- Recognizing that drunkenness is neither healthy nor safe. One should not excuse otherwise unacceptable behavior either for that individual or for others solely because of "too much to drink."
- Making contingency plans for intoxication, if it occurs in spite of efforts to prevent it, by assuming responsibility for the health and safety of guests – transportation home, overnight accommodations, etc.

Safety responsibilities such as:

- Drinking only in relaxed and responsible social situations.
- Recognizing that one's behavior and attitudes affect and will influence others, especially children.
- Choosing to avoid performing complex tasks, such as operating machinery, driving a car or other physical activities with inherent safety hazards, while under the influence of alcohol.
- Choosing to avoid the use of alcohol when it is the **only** purpose for participating in a social function.
- Choosing to avoid riding with a driver who is under the influence of alcohol, and discouraging him or her from driving.
- Choosing to abstain from the use of alcohol during working hours.

Health responsibilities such as:

- Recognizing that social acceptability does not require drinking.
- Recognizing that the frequent use of alcohol to cope with problems is high-risk behavior.
- Drinking slowly and staying within the bounds of one's personal, responsible consumption limit.
- Choosing to abstain from the use of alcohol for reasons of health or physical fitness.
- Heeding the advice of a physician either to avoid the use of alcohol or to use it as prescribed for specific health reasons.
- Recognizing that alcohol is a drug and understanding its effects.
- Being particularly cautious about using alcohol when other drugs are used.

In order to provide support for the concept of responsible decisions about alcohol, the industry will also:

- Refrain from using promotional messages that portray the use of alcohol as a way for the potential consumer to gain sex appeal, masculinity, sophistication or adult status, or as a means of solving one's problems.
- Utilize marketing techniques and strategies to convey messages of responsible use or non-use of beverage alcohol, in order to assist in the establishment of public policy that acknowledges irresponsible use of alcohol as unacceptable.

Signed _____

Date _____

MEMORANDUM

TO:

FROM: Business, Industry and Labor

RE: Policy Statement on Responsible Decisions about Alcohol

In view of the overwhelming evidence relating to the increasingly serious problems of alcohol abuse and alcoholism, all sponsored functions that include the serving of alcohol will adhere to and promote the following guidelines regarding alcohol.

When alcohol is served,

- The serving of alcohol will be a secondary focus at these functions.
- Food will be served with alcohol.
- Drinks will be of diluted strength, and hosts or sponsors will not urge that glasses be constantly full.
- Equally attractive and accessible non-alcoholic drinks will be provided.
- The cocktail hour before dinner will be kept to a reasonable time and consumption limit.
- The host or sponsor of the function should assume responsibility for thoughtful consideration of guests' health, safety and pleasure by avoiding intoxication and helping others to do the same.
- It should be recognized that drunkenness is neither healthy nor safe. One should not excuse otherwise unacceptable behavior either for that individual or for others solely because of "too much to drink."
- Alcohol will be served or used only in environments conducive to pleasant and relaxing behavior.

There are two responsible decisions about alcohol: (1) not to serve or use it, or (2) to serve or use it as outlined above.

Signed _____

Date _____

Education Commission of the States

The Education Commission of the States is a nonprofit organization formed by interstate compact in 1965. Forty-five states, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands are now members. Its goal is to further a working relationship among governors, state legislators and educators for the improvement of education. This report is an outcome of one of many Commission undertakings at all levels of education. The Commission offices are located at 300 Lincoln Tower, 1860 Lincoln Street, Denver, Colorado 80203.